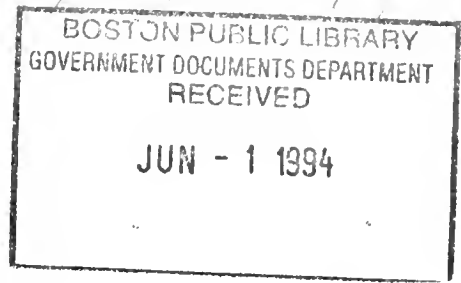




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HIGHLAND PARK, ROXBURY

REPORT AND PROPOSAL

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INTRODUCTION

This report has been written for the following purposes:

- to document the historical and architectural background of Highland Park
- to establish the reasons and need for the rehabilitation and improvement of the site
- to propose a program for rehabilitation and improvement of the park using available funds

- stimulus of civic pride in the Highland Park area
- strong community interest in Highland Park indicated by current local efforts to improve it

Proposal

purpose - to develop the visual, historical, architectural and recreational elements of Highland Park by rehabilitating the fort and the standpipe and by developing programs for community use of the park

recommendations - work necessary to rehabilitate the park
 general improvement of grounds and landscaping
 (trees and shrubs, paving, benches)

repair of standpipe

repair or replacement of commemorative historical markers

development of community participation programs

execution of project

outline of work by stages

detailed plans and cost estimates for first stage
 financing - from Parkman Fund and Federal Urban
 Beautification Program

Status as of January, 1968

In 1966 the Boston City Council approved a ten-year, city-wide program as part of the Federal Urban Beautification and Improvement Program which includes an estimated \$100,000 for Highland Park. In the 1968 application for funds from this program, the Boston Parks and Recreation Department has included a request for \$10,000 to be used on Highland Park. If the application is approved by the Boston City Council, it will be sent to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development during the spring, 1968.

I. SUMMARY OF REPORT

Location and description of Highland Park

Highland Park occupies over three acres of land on the top of the hill west of Highland Street in Roxbury. Its boundaries are defined by Fort Avenue, Fort Avenue Terrace, and Beach Glen Street. Natural outcroppings of puddingstone cover much of the area of the park. At the highest point, a Victorian water standpipe rises above an earthen platform marking the lines of a Revolutionary War fort. The view from the park commands a panorama of the Boston area.

Highland Park is within the boundaries of the Model Cities area.

Present Condition

The park is owned by the Parks and Recreation Department. The standpipe and grounds are in need of repairs which cannot be made with regular maintenance funds.

Reasons for Rehabilitation and Improvement of the Site

- visual prominence of the site with its irregular rocky topography and spectacular views of the surrounding area
- historical and architectural importance;
site of Revolutionary War fort used during the siege of Boston (1775-1776)

standpipe built in 1869 as a functioning part of the Cochituate Water System; a significant example of Victorian Gothic architecture

landscaping designed by Olmsted, Olmsted and Eliot in 1895
- combination of recreational use with visual and historic features
- focus for rehabilitation of property in the neighborhood around Highland Park

Chronological outline of the history of Highland Park

- 1775 hill fortified by Americans during the Revolutionary War
- strong earthwork reputedly designed by Henry Knox and Josiah Waters - first regular fortification in the Boston area
- location strategically vital in command of the Boston Neck and road to Dedham during the siege of Boston
- 1800's fort preserved by private citizens who owned it in common.
- 1840's & 1850's site suggested as public square by citizens and mayors, but no appropriation from City of Roxbury to purchase it
- 1868 Roxbury annexed to Boston
- 1869 remains of fort demolished during construction of water standpipe, a part of the Cochituate Water System which served the City of Boston
- 1877 tablet commemorating the Revolutionary War fort placed by the City of Boston at the base of the standpipe
- 1888 standpipe and grounds (known as Highland Park) received by the Department of the Common and Public Grounds in poor condition
- 1895 condition of standpipe and grounds prompted restoration efforts by Roxbury Historical Society and City of Boston
- plans for landscaping and restoring fort designed by Olmsted, Olmsted and Eliot

1900's restoration continued

 observation balcony (1907) and attendant's
 office (1911) added to standpipe

1913 park transferred to Parks and Recreation
 Department

 land added on west to increase park to
 present size

1917 completed restoration of fort lines and
 standpipe observatory dedicated by
 Roxbury Historical Society

1930's appropriation by City of Boston for repairs,
 paving, benches and a tablet to Henry Knox

1960's renewed interest in the park by local
 groups and press

II. DESCRIPTION OF SITE

General Location, Environment, Views

Highland Park lies on the crest of a rocky hill in Roxbury which rises from the Stony Brook Valley on the west (approximately the line of Columbus Avenue) and from Washington Street and the Washington Park Highlands on the east. The hill is one of the highest in Boston and commands a dramatic view in all directions---Prudential tower and downtown Boston to the north and northeast, Parker Hill and Mission Hill to the northwest, West Roxbury and the Blue Hills to the southwest and south, and highlands to the east.

The standpipe, located on the highest part of the hill near Fort Avenue, is, according to Charles Eliot, II (writing on the Boston park system in 1932), "monumental in effect and serves as a landmark, being visible from a great distance." It is visible from a surprising number of places--for example, from the elevated MBTA line especially near Egleston Square, from Charlesgate East in the Back Bay, and from Memorial Drive in Cambridge near the Harvard Bridge.

The surrounding neighborhood is residential with a mixture of detached wood and brick row houses. The local streets are narrow and curving in this hilly area.

Highland Park - Topography, Grounds

Highland Park occupies 158,421 square feet (3.6 acres) of land between Beech Glen Street, Fort Avenue and Fort Avenue Terrace. The elevation rises from 125 feet above sea level at the corner of Fort Avenue and Beech Glen Street to 168 feet at the highest point (at the base of the standpipe). There are large natural outcroppings of puddingstone on the slopes on the northwest and south of the standpipe. The vegetation consists of grass and weeds with a few small trees on the slopes along Beech Glen Street.

The standpipe and fort can be approached from three entrances--on the northeast from Fort Avenue, on the west from Beech Glen Street, and on the south from the corner of Beech Glen Street and the extension of the line of Fort Avenue Terrace. Curving walks lead from the entrances, forming a partial circuit outside of the fort platform--incomplete on the south where puddingstone formations would interfere with grading or paving. The entrance path from Beech Glen Street and a section on the northwest outside of the fort are wider than the rest of the walks; the concrete paving of all of them is cracked and uneven. The walks are connected to the top of the fort platform by granite steps--one flight on each the northwest and southeast sides and five flights on the northeast. Large rough chunks of puddingstone form an embankment on the northeast side of the fort and partially border the stairs on that side.

A retaining wall of large blocks of puddingstone bounds the park along the streets from Fort Avenue Terrace to the entrance on Beech Glen Street; between this entrance and the corner of Beech Glen Street and the extension of the line of Fort Avenue Terrace natural puddingstone formations eliminate the need for a wall. The wall has one opening between the corner of Fort Avenue and Beech Glen Street and the Beech Glen Street entrance, but this opening remains from an entrance leading to buildings during the previous use of this piece of land and does not connect with a pathway to the standpipe.

The Fort

In the northeast corner of Highland Park on the highest part of the hill is a level area which is the remains of the 1895-1917 restoration of the Revolutionary War fort. It is a quadrangular earthen platform with bastions at each corner but no parapet. The outline is indicated by concrete paving, and the earth slopes down from the edge of this pavement. The fort reconstruction occupies about one quarter of the land area of the park. (The distance between the points of the bastions at the edge of the pavement is about 175 feet.)

The Standpipe

The standpipe, constructed in 1869, stands within the fort platform, to the northeast of its center. It is a brick masonry structure with an octagonal base and entrance (or attendant's) office added in 1911. A gabled octagonal lookout and an iron balcony (added in 1907) are near the top of the structure (77 feet off the ground). Originally, a spire increased the height of the structure to 133 feet. The main cylinder of the standpipe is 15 feet 1 inch in diameter at the bottom and 13 feet 10 3/4 at the top.

Inside is an iron pipe, 5 feet in diameter and 80 feet high, which originally was used to contain water. A spiral staircase contained in a 3 foot space between the iron pipe and the masonry climbs to the lookout and balcony.

Historical Markers

Memorial markers have been placed in Highland Park from time to time. A marker on the standpipe lists the brigades of men who were involved with the fort in the Revolutionary War. A memorial placed in 1877 to indicate the site of the fort stands just off the north side of the standpipe.

Paving, Park Furniture, etc.

All of the graded walks in the park have been paved with concrete, and the flights of steps built of granite. Retaining walls on the boundaries of the park were built of puddingstone.

Benches have been placed on the paved section of the fort platform.

The remains of a few pieces of small children's play equipment are also evident--the supporting bar from a see-saw to the south of the fort platform, and a log container for a sandpile on the northeast.

III. PRESENT CONDITION AND USE OF THE SITE

Natural Features, Grounds

The basic form of Highland Park remains from the landscaping and restoration designs of Olmsted, Olmsted and Eliot--including the walks, fort platform, and some of the puddingstone retaining walls.

The most obvious changes have been the result of natural weathering and vandalism--tending to obliterate the contours of the fort, cracking the paving, and contributing to the deterioration of the standpipe. Most of the vegetation, consisting of grass, weeds, and a few small trees is uncultivated natural growth, though some efforts have been made in the summer-fall of 1967 to cultivate and plant flowers around the base of the standpipe. The park is generally free of litter and broken glass.

The Fort

The lines of the fort remain as restored between 1895 and 1917 though erosion and growth of grass and weeds have made the earthen slopes considerably less clear. The concrete paving which outlines the shape of the fort is now cracked and uneven.

The Standpipe

On the exterior of the standpipe the brick and mortar have deteriorated though some nearby residents, concerned about the condition of the structure have replaced some of the bricks which had fallen out. Most of the paint has peeled or worn off and the roofs are gaping.

The standpipe is no longer used as an observation tower and the entrance is locked. The structure seems sound, but the analysis of a structural engineer would be necessary to determine what repairs the interior stairway and the balcony need.

Much of the decoration of the structure is gone--the iron finials on the gables of the observatory and the spire which once increased the height of the standpipe to 133 feet. Also, the windows have been broken and boarded or bricked in. In the octagonal base and attendant's office the pointed arches which could frame historical markers (as the existing marker on the northwest) have been filled with brick and the entrance arch has been filled to fit a rectangular double door.

Historical Markers

Of the various commemorative markers which have been placed on the standpipe, only one indicating the brigades of men from the Revolutionary War remains; the former position of another now appears as a stain on the paint beside the entrance of the attendant's office. In addition, the free-standing marker placed in 1877 commemorating the site of the fort remains, with a recent coat of silver-gray paint covering miscellaneous scrawled writing.

Section VI, Inventory of Historic Features, lists the existing markers and others which have been on the site at earlier times.

Paving, Park Furniture, etc.

The concrete paving which remains from work done during the 1930's is now uneven with weeds growing in cracks.

The puddingstone retaining walls seem to be in good condition though the mortar has been patched at a few points.

The benches, of which only a few remain, are in poor condition (especially, the wooden seats have split and splintered and the paint has worn off).

The few pieces of play equipment formerly on the site are not usable--the rusted supporting bar is all that remains of the see-saw.

Present Use

At present the park is used passively by nearby residents enjoying the view (generally older people), actively as an unsupervised playground for children, and as an informal voluntary project by local residents interested in cleaning up and repairing the park and by a group of children organized by the Roxbury-North Dorchester Beautification Committee to develop planting areas (so far, the area around the base of standpipe). Also, many dogs running loose in the area freely roam over the park.

IV. PROPOSAL FOR REHABILITATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF HIGHLAND PARK

A. Proposal

To develop the visual, historical, architectural and recreational aspects of Highland Park and its relationship to the neighborhood by:

rehabilitating and maintaining the lines of the Revolutionary War fort and the standpipe with its observation balcony

developing recreational activities in conjunction with the visual and historical elements

using community interest and participation for initial work and continuing activities in the park

B. Reasons for Rehabilitation as a Public Park

The Highland Park area is one of the few natural sites in the Boston area with a combination of visual, historical, architectural, and recreational values which can be developed both in the park itself and in the surrounding community. Indications of community interest and participation would support the development of the park as public space, improved and used by persons of all ages living in the neighborhood.

Visual Prominence

The unusual natural features of Highland Park---the topography, puddingstone formations and view--make a varied and interesting site for a public park. The view from the park and from the standpipe should be accessible to the neighborhood and other interested persons. Also, the visibility of the standpipe from a distance and its value as a landmark for people in the area would support maintenance of the standpipe.

Historical and Architectural Value

Highland Park has historical significance for three reasons, each of which deserves commemoration by preservation and rehabilitation of the site.

The Revolutionary War fort on the site was a vital position for the Americans during the siege of Boston.

The standpipe was a functioning section of the Cochituate Water System, is a delightful interpretation of the Victorian Gothic architectural style, and is one of the few water standpipes remaining in the United States today.

The landscaping of the park is connected with Frederick Law Olmsted and the planning of the Boston Park system.

Recreation

As 3.6 acres of land, the park can combine recreational use with its visual and historic elements. A certain amount of passive and active recreation does not destroy or interfere with the natural features of the site. General recreational programs for the area can be coordinated with other facilities nearby--Horatio Harris Park, Washington Park, Connally Field, school playgrounds and small pieces of vacant land.

Focus for Renewal

The visible accomplishment of restoration of the park and standpipe would stimulate interest in the area. It could serve as a focal point in an architectural-historical rehabilitation and preservation program in the Highland Park area. Supporting rehabilitation and renewal efforts as part of the Model Cities Program in the area would also encourage improvement of the park. Participation by the community would fulfill a major purpose of the Model Cities Program.

Civic Pride

The historical and architectural significance of the site would emphasize the historical and cultural background of the Highland Park area. This should encourage local pride in the assets and potentials of the area.

Community Interest

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, Roxbury citizens have been interested in Highland Park as an important landmark of local history. Often government action and funding have been slow to respond to the citizens but petitions for measures to preserve Highland Park continue. This interest reached a peak when the Roxbury Historical Society prompted the major Highland Park restoration between 1895 and 1917.

In the past few years a strong interest in the area and in the park has again increased. People concerned about their historic and architectural heritage have begun rehabilitating houses in the neighborhood and have been attracted by the possibilities of Highland Park at the same time as they have been critical of its neglect. The Roxbury Historical Society, the Roxbury-North Dorchester Beautification Committee and the Norfolk House Center as well as local residents are concerned about the park. This interest has been demonstrated by current efforts to generally clean up the park, to repair the standpipe and to plant flowers.

Other Interest in the Park

Interest in Highland Park goes beyond the Roxbury area to include many people in the Boston area concerned with architectural and historical preservation and with recreation. After the restoration of the park had been dedicated in 1917, it was compared favorably with the Bunker Hill Monument in terms of historic importance of the site and in the extent of the view. In 1946, John McCormack, at the celebration of the centennial of Roxbury as a city (sic.), spoke of making the park a

"national historical shrine." In 1967, the Boston Architectural Center assigned the project of a playground at Highland Park for their second year design class. In 1966 and 1967 the Boston press has published articles on the condition of the park and agitated for improvements.

C. Specific Recommendations

General Design

The natural topography of Highland Park requires little formal design beyond the existing walks, fort platform, and standpipe. Plans for the park should preserve its natural characteristics--concentrating on the rehabilitation and maintenance of existing features, and on selective planting of a few new trees and shrubs.

General Grounds and Landscaping

Refer to Olmsted plans of 1895 and 1912 for layout--fort, walkways, planting recommendations.

Repair lines of fort, replace cannon.

Repair paving and drainage of walkways.

If a walk connected to the entrance in the wall on Beech Glen Street seems desirable, design in keeping with earlier plans (this is probably not necessary and may not be possible because of rock formations).

Develop planting areas of natural vegetation.

Repair or replace and relocate benches not only on the fort platform but at other appropriate positions.

Place litter containers.

Standpipe

Repair brick, paint standpipe.

Repair roofs.

Repair windows--pointed arches in base should be restored as windows or as frames for historical markers (removing the filled in brick should indicate the original use of these arches); entrance arch should be restored with a suitable door.

Restore iron decoration (pictures of the standpipe at the time of construction and from about 1912 show these features).

Repair balcony.

Reopen observatory with markers pointing out the view (as in 1912, but brought up to date)

Arrange for supervision when the observatory would be open--a local resident should be hired for this job.

Possible times for observatory to be open: weekends year-round, daily during the summer, several evenings a week, by appointment (with key in possession of attendant or nearby agency).

Preferably no charge, or minimal charge to cover maintenance.

Display relevant historical and informational materials in attendant's office--include materials on fort, standpipe, maps illustrating view, maps and materials related to present programs (Model Cities); provide some publications for distribution (maps, etc.).

Arrange security measures to prevent damage by vandals or by weather.

Perhaps remove valuable and perishable documents in winter.

Provide some kind of night lighting.

Historical Markers

Refer to list of present and past items--evaluate condition and relevance of each before replacing.

Place permanent plaques on designated positions on base of standpipe.

Include commemoration of the major historical events and the present significance of restoration of the standpipe.

Permanent commemorative markers would be supplemented by the display inside the attendant's office.

Recreational Facilities

Emphasize park with historic and visual features.

Emphasize local use.

Any additional equipment should be designed to fit the site, using natural materials (stone, wood, and concrete).

For general neighborhood participation: short term, annual event similar to but not competitive with "Sunday in the Park" at Horatio Harris Park--at different time of year, perhaps emphasize celebration of historic event or holiday; as focal point for architectural-historic preservation program in neighborhood--coordinating point (in conjunction with John Eliot Square) for walking tours of important sites, buildings; include maps, descriptions of architectural styles, examples of good rehabilitation--special tours might be arranged for organizations, school classes, investigate night lighting for evening use.

Neighborhood

Coordinate development of park with general neighborhood improvements under Model Cities Program, particularly architectural-historical rehabilitation and preservation, and recreation.

Establish (or amend) zoning laws and design controls to protect the residential character of the neighborhood--use, building density, lot size, design of rehabilitation and new construction--and height limits to protect the view from the standpipe.

Community Participation

Stimulate participation by local organizations--obtain specific proposals and commitments for initial steps and sustaining interest--volunteer work programs, publicity.

Model City Board

Local civic groups (Highland Park Council, Highland Park Civic Association, Highland Streeters, Kittredge Park Association)

Roxbury-North Dorchester Beautification Committee

Roxbury Historical Society

Churches, schools, libraries

Hire local residents for supervision of observatory.

Employ local residents for much of general work, initial and continuing--cleaning, repairs, maintenance, construction of any recreational equipment, selection and display of historical materials.

Attract continued use with recreational facilities and events--stimulate locally organized and sponsored tours and other events.

Publicity

Neighborhood organizations

Displays--libraries, churches, schools, banks, post office

Publications, newspapers

General tourist information for Boston

Personal Contact

D. Execution of Project

Financing

Sources of funds available at the present time for historical preservation and recreation improvements in Highland Park are the Parkman Fund (City of Boston, Parks and Recreation Department) and the Urban Beautification and Improvement Program (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development). The proposed work could be financed by a combination of Parkman and Urban Beautification funds. Money for regular maintenance could be included in the annual Parks and Recreation Department budget. Future supporting funds may become available through the Model Cities program.

Proposed Staging of Work

1. 1968 - ground improvements

- Clean up grounds
- Reinforce shape of fort platform
- Improve platform area at base of standpipe
- Repair or replace and relocate benches
- Plant trees and bushes
- Place litter containers

2. 1969 - exterior of standpipe

- Repair roofs
- Repair, repoint, paint brick walls
- Repair windows and doors
- Restore iron decoration (finials on gables, spire)
- Replace historical markers
- Investigate possibility of replacing cannon on fort

3. 1970 -- ground improvements

Repair or repave concrete walks in park
Grade and pave sidewalk outside park on Beech Glen
Street and Fort Avenue (Public Works Department)
Investigate possibilities for night lighting

4. 1971 - interior of standpipe

Reopen standpipe as observation tower
Clean interior, repair stairs, provide
lighting, establish hours, hire supervision,
arrange informational materials, arrange security
measures
Consider arrangements for parking

Stage One - Plans

Plans for the first stage of work on Highland Park propose general improvements of the site at a cost of about \$10,000 (the amount requested for the park by the Parks and Recreation Department in the 1968 application for funds from the Federal Urban Beautification Program).

Specific plans for the park should be worked out with the Parks and Recreation Department, City Demonstration Agency, Model City Board, and interested community groups.

V. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF HIGHLAND PARK

Colonial Settlement and Revolutionary War

During the colonial period, the town of Roxbury centered near the present John Eliot Square and industrial development grew up along the Stoney Brook Valley. Large farms and estates were scattered along the rough hills including the site of Highland Park south of what is now Dudley Street.

When the Revolutionary War broke out, Roxbury was in a strategic position to control the only land route in and out of Boston. The main road from Boston followed the Neck on what is now Washington Street to the mainland in Roxbury. It turned on Roxbury Street and led west to Brookline and Cambridge along what is now Tremont Street, or south toward Dedham along what is now Centre Street (Washington Street did not extend south of Dudley Street at this time). Therefore, the British soldiers had to march through Roxbury on their way to Lexington in April, 1775.

Several sites in Roxbury were selected for fortifications to enforce the siege of Boston--among the first were the Lower Fort (off Highland Street between Cedar and Linwood Streets) and the High Fort (in what is now Highland Park) which were built during the summer of 1775.

The High Fort, reputedly designed by Henry Knox and Josiah Waters, was a quadrangular earthwork about 12 rods square with a bastion at each corner and embankments 8 to 15 feet high. The northeast side faced Boston, and the magazine and an opening for making sudden strikes or raids was located on the southwest side.

The Fort was described by Major-General William Heath, a commanding officer in the Roxbury area, as "one of the strongest works that was erected" in the Boston area. It was "built on the summit of a rock, and being perhaps the first attempt at a regular fortification, it was considered by the militia of unparalleled strength, and excited great confidence in that wing of the army stationed at Roxbury."

More important than the strength of the fort was its location on the top of the hill which effectively commanded both the land route from Boston along the Neck and the road to Dedham. It was therefore, a key point from which to harass the British and frequently exchanged fire with them. Because the Roxbury area remained a patriot stronghold throughout the siege, the High Fort was not involved in major or decisive battles as were Breed's and Bunker Hills or Dorchester Heights. However, the High Fort was a vital section of the encirclement of Boston, constantly preventing the British from receiving supplies or reinforcements by land and eventually forcing their evacuation. "When Washington took command of the army (in July, 1775), he regarded this fort as the best and most eligibly located of all the works in course of construction."

19th Century

During the 19th century the residents of Roxbury attempted to preserve the High Fort as a landmark of the Revolutionary War. In 1825 five Roxbury citizens purchased the estate which included the High Fort. They held the fort in common and kept it in good condition. About 1830 they offered to sell the site to Roxbury for a public square, but the town was unable to purchase it at that time.

After Roxbury became a city in 1846, new interest developed to obtain public squares for the town, including the fort. Benson J. Lossing described the condition of the fort in 1850 in his Field-Book of the American Revolution.

I have nowhere seen a fortification of the Revolution so well preserved as this except the old quadrangular fort or castle at Chambly, on the Sorel; and it is to be hoped that patriotic reverence will so consecrate the ground on which this relic lies, that unhallowed gain may never lay upon the old ramparts the hand of demolition.

Mayors A.H.S. Dearborn (1847-1851) and John Sherburne Sleeper (1856-1858) regarded the site as important for both its historical background and its view. Speaking to the City Council in 1848 Mayor Dearborn said:

a site has been designated, on the hill west of Highland Street, ... which is worthy of the most serious consideration, for it will afford not only a pleasant promenade, and from its commanding elevation a most extensive and interesting prospect, which is richly diversified with objects of exceeding beauty and grandeur, and historical celebrity; but includes one of those renowned military works which were constructed by the Revolutionary Army, during the investment of Boston, while that city was occupied by the British troops.

A decade later, Mayor Sleeper continued to urge the preservation of the site.

The extensive but regular fortifications hastily constructed in the early part of the revolutionary war on the "Highlands of Roxbury", remains even now unchanged, excepting by the hand of Time. It still retains its angles and outlines with wonderful perfection. This old fortification, standing on one of the boldest heights of land, may be regarded not only as one of the most pleasant and interesting localities in the city, but as one of the most valuable relics of the revolution itself

The memorials of the revolution are rapidly diminishing....Even the old landmarks and heights, where our ancestors made a bold stand in behalf of the "rights of man", are levelled to the ground, or about to be swept away by the reckless hand of public improvement. An opportunity now offers, which if neglected, will be lost forever, of securing to the City of Roxbury or to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, a spot, hallowed by the most sacred associations; a memorial of the revolution, far nobler than the most costly monument, and which should be kept by a grateful people uninjured,

and in a condition to kindle in the hearts of visitors, a degree of patriotic zeal and devotion, equal at least to the religious fervor of the Mahomedan, who makes a pilgrimage to the distant shrine of the Prophet.

However, the Roxbury City Councils failed to respond to the patriotic eloquence of their Mayors and no money was appropriated to acquire the land.

Construction of the Standpipe

The annexation of Roxbury to Boston in 1868 led to plans for including Roxbury in the Cochituate water system that served the City of Boston. The problem of serving the highlands which were above the elevation of existing reservoirs required considerable research by the Water Board.* Systems used by other cities at the time were examined, and eventually the standpipe system was chosen. The so-called "Old Fort Lot" seemed a natural site; its selection was described by Desmond Fitzgerald in The History of the Water Works 1868-1876.

A number of citizens opposed this disposition of the lot, on the ground that it should be sacredly preserved as a relic. A petition was referred to the Joint Standing Committee on Water, who reported, July 12, "That if these earthworks were at the present time in anything like their original state, it would be desirable to preserve them as an interesting memorial of such an important event; but time and the action of individuals have made such inroads upon them that their value as a memorial is lost." The site was also described as being necessary for the Water Works.

During the construction of the standpipe the remains of the old fort were demolished, though an 1869 plan showed the location of the bastions and outline of the parapet.

* Nathaniel J. Bradlee, a prominent Boston architect and engineer who lived on Highland Street, Roxbury, was president of the Cochituate Water Board at this time (1868-1871).

Although the reason for the construction of the standpipe was as a functioning device to provide fresh water for the area, it was also designed as an architectural feature to ornament the site and to allow public enjoyment of the view. The History of the Water Works 1868-1876 gives a detailed description.

The standpipe consists of a boiler iron shell, 5 feet in diameter and 80 feet in length. This pipe is enclosed by a handsome circular structure of brickwork with granite trimmings.

There is a three-foot space between the interior pipe and the outer wall, which is occupied by a spiral staircase leading to the look-out at the top...

The exterior, at the base, is finished with four pediments, with buttresses at the angles. The circular wall ... is unbroken (except by the windows) to within 10 feet of the roof, where it projects in an octagonal form and is crowned with a steeple...

The handsome proportions of this standpipe and the thoroughness of the work, combine to place it in the foreground of such structures. The exterior is painted white, and is a marked object from the surrounding country.

The contract for the iron-work was let to the Boston Machine Company.

The masonry was built by Messrs. Standish and Woodbury.

It was decorated with a cast iron spire and finials. The grounds were laid out, "so as to be accessible for carriages from Beech Glen Avenue to the base of the tower." The drive from Beech Glen Avenue led to a circular, paved platform surrounding the standpipe.

The High Service which included the standpipe and a pumping system was opened in February, 1870. This was a temporary system which served a small area of high elevation and was abandoned about 1880 after the annexation of Dorchester, Brighton and West Roxbury required the construction of a new reservoir on Parker Hill..

Restoration of the Site--Landscaping

During the 1870's and 1880's Boston citizens became concerned with establishing a system of public parks. Highland Park (as the standpipe grounds were named) was noted as an important vantage point with its tower. In 1888 the park was transferred first to the Boston Park Department, then to the Department of the Common and Public Grounds. Apparently, the standpipe and grounds had begun to deteriorate when they were no longer used by the Cochituate Water System, and the Superintendent of the Common and Public Grounds reported that a special appropriation would be necessary for renovations.

Meanwhile, Roxbury citizens had continued to be concerned about the park. In 1877 the City of Boston placed a marker near the standpipe commemorating the fort and its role in the siege of Boston. During the 1890's the standpipe and its grounds had reached such a deplorable condition from neglect and vandalism that the citizens appealed to the city for improvements. The press reported:

It is not merely the grounds that are in a dilapidated condition, but the great white tower itself, which, instead of being a thing of beauty, as it once was, threatens soon to become a rendezvous for disreputable and disorderly people, who gather there at night and commit acts of vandalism. The tower is an object well known not only to people in its immediate vicinity, but to those living in the cities and towns around Boston, for it is in such an elevated position that it can be seen many miles away.

The Roxbury Military Historical Society (changed to the Roxbury Historical Society in 1901) pressed for restoration and preservation of the Revolutionary War fort. By 1895, the Boston Engineering Department prepared estimates for repairs and the restoration of the lines of the original fort. Historical references on the fort (including early plans and descriptions) were consulted and a white pine model of the fort was constructed by a Civil Engineer, John W. McClintock. This model was donated to the Bostonian Society and is presently on loan to the Roxbury Historical Society in the Dillaway-Thomas House (183 Roxbury Street).

Plans for restoration of the Revolutionary War fort and for landscaping the park were prepared by the landscape architects, Olmsted, Olmsted, and Eliot and were submitted to City Engineer William Jackson. A reconstruction of the quadrangular shape of the fort replaced the circular walk at the base of the standpipe; and walkways were designed to follow the contours of the hill, avoiding the rockier areas and not conforming rigidly to the symmetry of the fort lines. Planting was limited to vegetation appropriate to the rocky soil and exposed condition of the site. Details of the plan were described in the Boston Evening Transcript, September 19, 1895:

Old Fort Square

Mr. Olmsted's Plans for Beautifying Highland Park, Roxbury

Frederick L. Olmsted, Landscape Architect, has submitted to City Engineer William Jackson, a preliminary plan for the improvement of the public ground known as Highland Park, or Old Fort Square, Roxbury, in accordance with the order of the City Council appropriating \$5000 for this purpose. His instructions were that the old fort was to be restored up to the level of the interior platform, omitting the parapet. He has followed these instructions in his plan; but he advises that in order to preserve the steep banks of the fort from being trespassed upon, and so made disorderly, a stout

iron picket fence, about three and one-half feet high, be erected on the line which represents the inner face of the original parapet.

The remaining space outside the fence and to the bottom of the slopes of the fort he advises should be covered with a low, hardy vine, preferably a prickly one, and he suggests for this purpose Rosa Wichuradana, which has been successfully used in the parks under similar conditions. The platform of the fort within the proposed fence, he advises, should be surfaced with a light macadam or gravel, until such time as the city can afford to cover it with a handsome and durable pavement. This will form an elevated playground for children and will be in accord with the aspect of a fortification. No attempt to grow turf on this surface would, in his opinion, be successful, and he decidedly advises against it. He also advises against the admission of carriages to so small a ground. There is comparatively little view to be obtained from the surface of the ground, and he thinks it can be no great hardship to visitors to alight from their carriages at either one of the entrances and walk from there to the summit. He recommends the retaining of substantially the present driveway for administration purposes and for use on special occasions, but says it is so steep as to be unsuitable for general public use. It should be paved, he says, with some durable paving blocks, as macadam would wash out too badly, and asphalt would be too slippery. While the gateway to this drive should be kept closed sufficiently to prevent carriages from entering, a small footgate should be left open.

Mr. Olmsted, says in concluding his report: "What we have above described seems to be all that is absolutely necessary to carry out our instructions. We believe, however, that the ground is likely to prove of far greater

value and to be used in a much more respectable way, and thus be kept in better condition, if additional walks and concourses for people on foot are provided in other parts of the grounds than the platform of the fort. In studying such walks we thought it desirable to secure a complete circuit within the boundary, with three widenings in each of the recesses between the bastions, and to move the entrance on Fort Avenue so that it will be symmetrical with the fort and tower, and to introduce another entrance for greater convenience at the corner of Beech Glen Street and Highland Park Avenue (now Fort Avenue Terrace). Some of these walks will be temporarily in macadam or gravel, it would be better if they were all laid in brick or some other durable paving material.

"The above-mentioned concourses will be in two cases desirably made into terraces, the retaining walls of which may be built of rough pudding-stone, with a parapet of the same general character as that on the Overlook in Franklin Park. The remaining spaces within the boundaries are so contracted and the soil is so poor that we should advise that the whole surface be covered with low bushes and creepers, with perhaps a few trees to screen out the more obtrusive neighboring houses."

Highland Park, Mr. Olmsted thinks, is "a horrid name," and he suggests the far more appropriate designation of "Old Fort Square, now that it is actually to be mostly occupied by the fort."

Work proceeded until the appropriation was used up in 1899. This included repair and repainting of the standpipe, and construction of a retaining wall on Fort Avenue. Also:

The work done was to complete the grading of the fort itself, to loam and seed the slopes, make a macadam surface on the area inside the fort, build two additional flights of steps, construct the driveway from Beech Glen Avenue to the fort, build a walk on the westerly side of the hill below the fort, remove and place in a new position the memorial stone, and to clean up and leave in a respectable condition the whole part; much, however, remains to be done to give the whole ground a finished appearance.

Additional special appropriations were made in 1907 to add an iron balcony designed by Francis J. Kennedy, architect; in 1911 for an attendant's office, "made necessary by reason of the increasing number of visitors to the Old Fort Observatory:" and in 1912 for eighteen bronze plaques to be attached to the balcony to indicate points of interest.

Also, an appropriation in 1912 allowed for improvements to the surrounding grounds. The firm of Olmsted, Olmsted and Eliot supplied the plans, updating those prepared in 1895. Little change was made--a new wall was constructed at the corner of Fort Avenue and Fort Avenue Terrace, and the walk redesigned at that corner. Also, the walk from the new entrance from the corner of Beech Glen Street and the extension of the line of Fort Avenue Terrace was redesigned near the fort. The placement of benches and the completion of the observatory balcony on the standpipe allowed visitors to take advantage of the view.

In 1912-13 Highland Park came under the jurisdiction of the Parks and Recreation Department when the Department of Public Grounds merged with it. At this time 44,356 square feet of land on the northwest was purchased to extend the park to its present boundaries at the corner of Beech Glen Street and Fort Avenue. This addition had been proposed first in the 1890's to "give an unobstructed view from the fort, and thus add greatly to the effect." It did not require changes in the existing landscape

design. An entrance through the retaining wall on Beech Glen Street remains from the previous use of the piece of land and has not been developed into an approach to the standpipe and fort.

In 1915, the Park Department contracted with Van Amringe Granite Company for "casting, furnishing, installing and placing a battery of four revolutionary cannon, with gun carriages, at Highland Park." The work which had proceeded for 20 years was completed in 1916 and dedicated with speeches and a parade on Patriot's Day, 1917.

Thousands of citizens of Roxbury participated in the all-day dedicatory exercises of the restored Roxbury High Fort, the key of the chain of forts, which, in 1776, compelled the evacuation of General Howe and his British troops from Boston. The fort has been restored to its original condition by the city and was dedicated yesterday (April 17, 1917) as a public park under the auspices of the Roxbury Historical Society.

A solid earthen plinth following the outlines of the old fort marks the site. On the four bastions are mounted cannon of the Revolutionary type, specially cast and mounted. In the center rises the graceful tower, known for miles around from its former use as the "Roxbury Standpipe." A graceful balcony surmounting it has been transformed it into an observatory from which the country can be studied for many miles. All points of Revolutionary interest in the vicinity are indicated by arrows on bronze plates, noting their distance from the High Fort so that they can be easily located. No city in the country has a Revolutionary relic better preserved or more intelligently utilized.

Highland Park along with other parks in the area--Orchard Park, Madison Park, Washington Park and Fountain Square (now Horatio Harris Park)--designed at about the same time by Olmsted, Olmsted and Eliot are related to Franklin Park and the Boston Park System.

The Past 50 Years

Highland Park has been maintained by the Parks and Recreation Department with no changes in the actual layout of the park. The city made a special appropriation during the 1930's for repairs and improvements. The walks were paved with concrete, limiting the terrace "widening" of the 1895 plan to a wider paved area on the northwest and an unpaved flat area above the stone embankment between the steps on the northeast. 46 benches and a tablet to Henry Knox were placed.

Since the 1930's the park and standpipe have fallen into disrepair again caused by neglect and vandalism. In the 1960's however, local residents have reawakened interest in the park. Some of them have cleaned up the park and made repairs to the standpipe, while others have developed a plan for planting flowers around the standpipe.

VI. INVENTORY OF HISTORIC FEATURES PREVIOUSLY
OR PRESENTLY IN HIGHLAND PARK

Revolutionary War fort--restored lines in place

Cannon--four cast to Revolutionary War specifications, placed in 1916 missing

Standpipe--built 1869, with later additions in place
decorative ironwork missing

Marker placed at time of construction of standpipe missing

1869

Highland Park Cochituate Water Works

Nathaniel J. Bradlee, president

Benjamin James, Alexander Wadsworth,

Francis A. Osborn, Joseph B.

Wightman, George Lewis, Charles H.

Allen

Contractors for the building--

Messrs. Standish and Woodbury

Iron Work--Boston Machine Company,

superintendent E. R. James

Marker placed 1876-77, marble or granite, in place
freestanding

On this eminence stood Roxbury High Fort,
a strong earthwork planned by Henry
Knox and Josiah Waters and erected by
the American army, June, 1775, crowning
the famous Roxbury lines of investment
at the siege of Boston

(opposite side of marker)

The erection of this tablet was authorized
by the City Council in A.D. 1876

Samuel C. Cobb, Mayor

Completed in A.D. 1877

Frederick O. Prince, Mayor

Marker in place on northwest side of standpipe in place

Right Wing Continental Army

Siege of Boston

1775-1776

Major General Artemas Ward, Commanding

Headquarters at Roxbury

Brigader General John Thomas' Brigade

....

Brigader General Joseph Spencer's

Brigade

....

Detachments Pennsylvania and Virginia

Riflemen

United train of Artillery (Rhode Island)

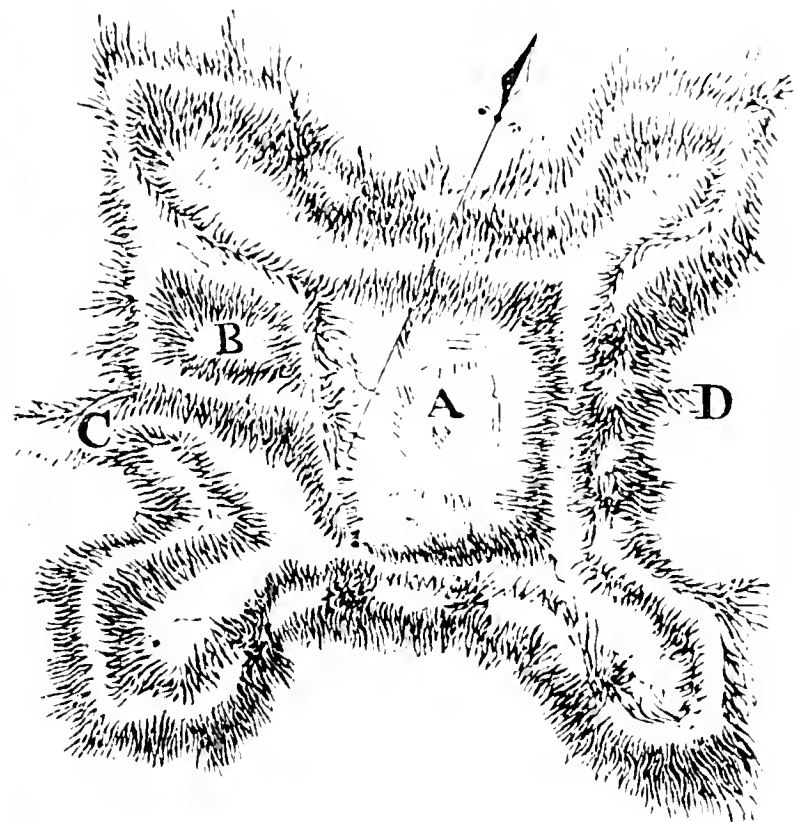
Major John Crane

Tablet on southeast side of attendant's office to right of entrance, placed in 1931 to honor Henry Knox missing

Plaques indicating view from balcony placed 1912 missing







GROUND PLAN OF THE FORT. 3

Drawing of the Revolutionary War fort, from B.J. Lossing,
Field-Book of the American Revolution, 1852



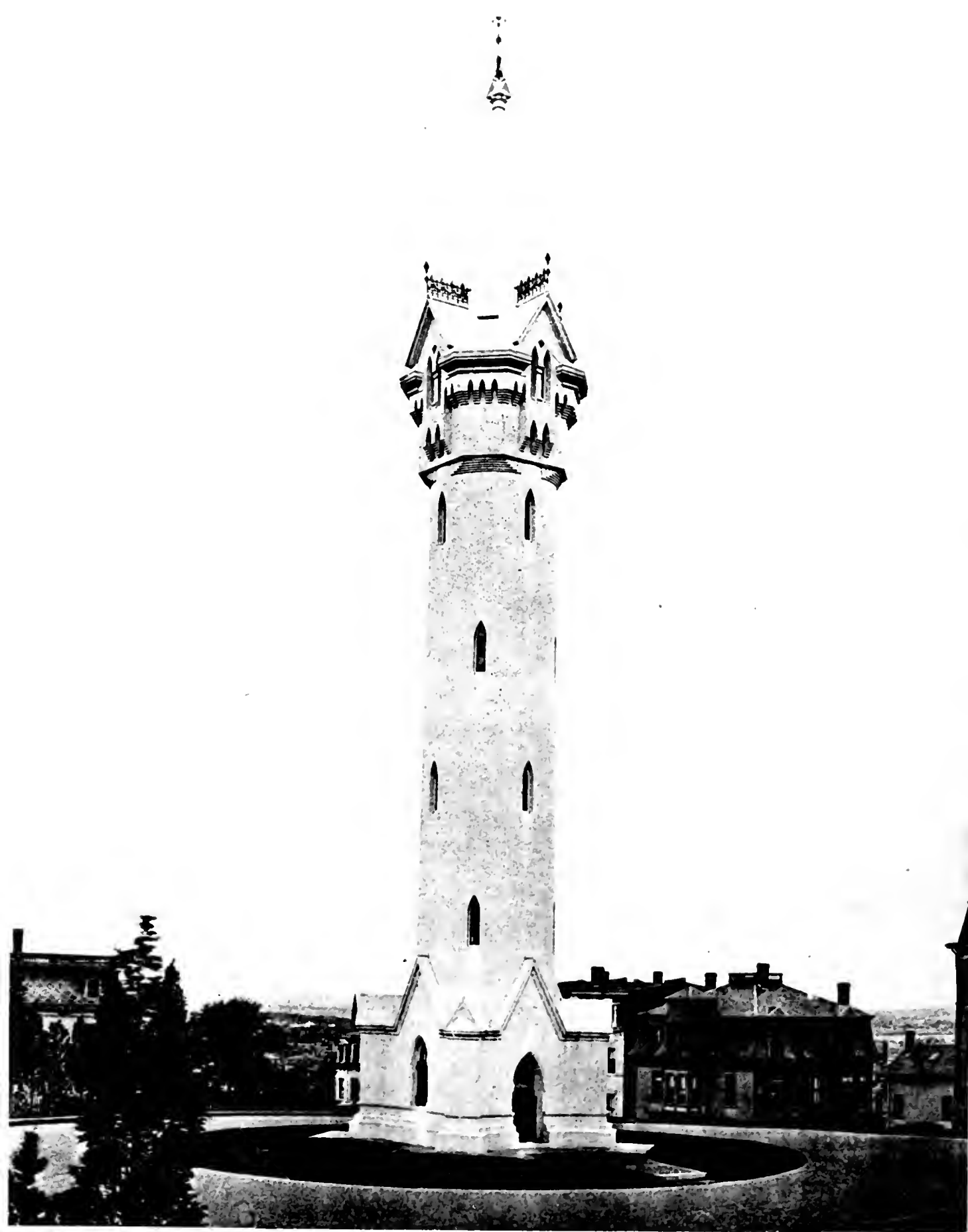
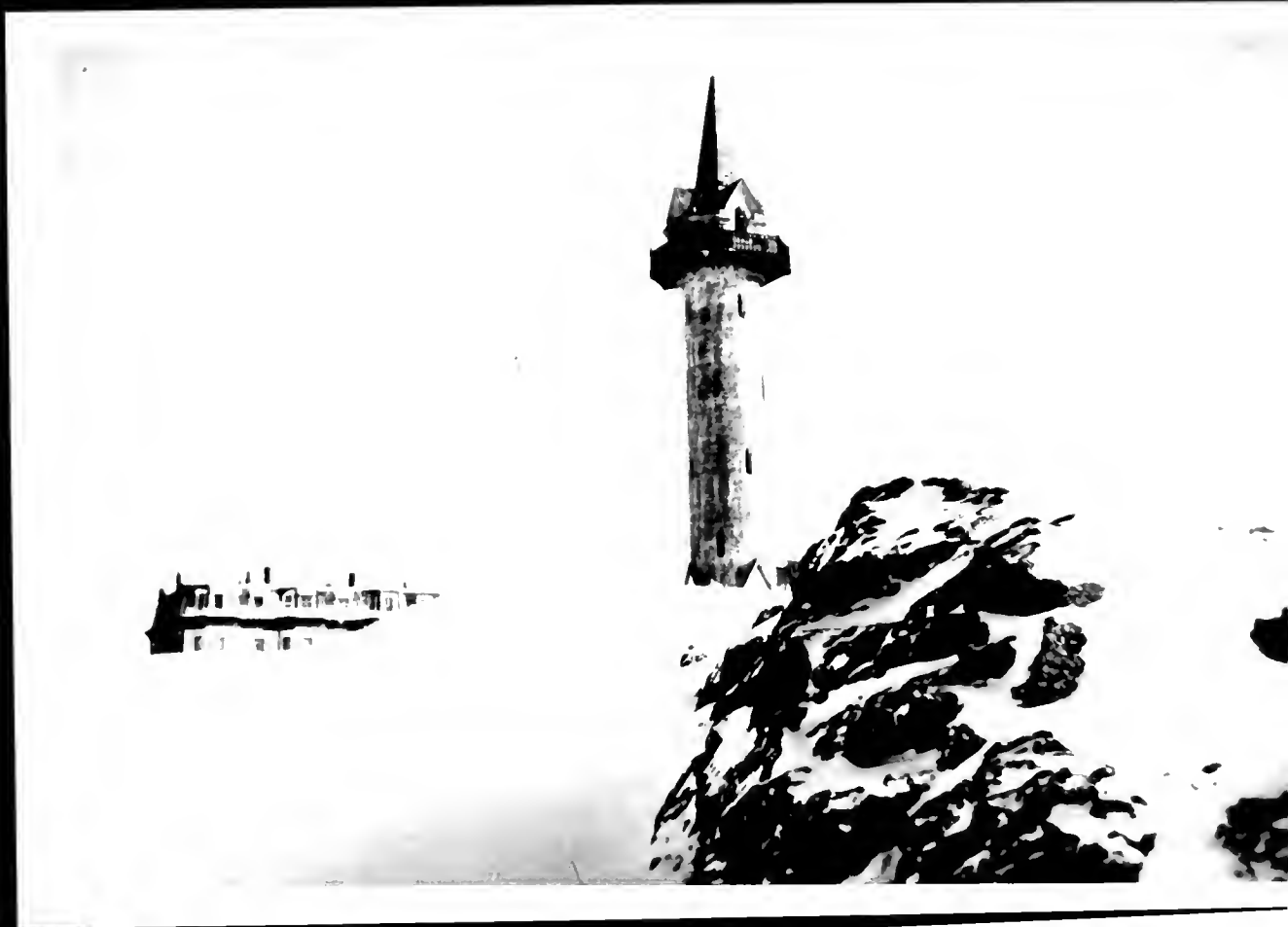


Photo of the standpipe soon after construction, from
D. FitzGerald, History of the Water Works 1868-1876





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